

The Danger of False Teaching

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:14b–19

Code: 55-9

INTRODUCTION

Scripture clearly affirms that God is truth, that God speaks truth, and that God cannot lie. Scripture also affirms that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is in the business of deceiving people. God reveals Himself as truth and Satan is revealed as its antithesis. That particular dichotomy pervades every area of the universe. There is conflict between the holy angels and unholy demons. There is conflict on earth between the truth of God and the lies of Satan.

The people of God have always been plagued with false doctrine. They have endured the invasion of false prophets and teachers throughout the ages. Satan attempts to confuse the world by drowning it in a sea of deceit. It was Satan's misrepresentation of the truth to Eve that plunged the human race into sin (Gen. 3:1-6). The steady stream of false teaching has been so cumulative that it is wider and deeper now than it has ever been. False teaching about God, Christ, the Bible, and spiritual reality is pandemic. The father of lies works overtime to destroy the saving, sanctifying truth God has given to us in His Word. The effects of false teaching have been devastating and damning. That's why the Bible calls them destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1). I believe that as we get closer to the coming of Christ, these deceptions, lies, and misrepresentations will increase.

Any servant of the Lord must be aware of false teachers and warn others about their lies. That is why the apostle Paul warned the believers and leaders in Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30).

Second Timothy 2:14-19 specifically tells us why we should avoid false teaching. Paul had called Timothy to be a faithful servant of the Lord. He asked him to rise above the influence of ungodliness, evil teaching, and evil people, and to set the church right. To do so he had to keep his mind on the truth of God, and be sure that he and his people avoided the impact of false teaching.

LESSON

I. REMINDING TRUE TEACHERS (v. 14a)

"Remind them of these things."

The literal translation would read, "Remind of these things." The word "them" was added because it identifies who is being reminded-- the faithful men of verse 2. What things were they to be reminded of? What Paul said in verses 1-13. Paul wanted Timothy to remind the church leaders and teachers of their responsibility to pass on the truth to others. They needed to be reminded of the noble cause they served and the loftiness of the gospel ministry.

II. AVOIDING FALSE TEACHING (vv. 14b-19)

A transition takes place from Paul's positive reminder to his negative command. In verse 14 he says, "Solemnly charge them." Timothy was not just to continually remind the people of the noble cause they serve, but also to "solemnly charge (Gk., diamarturomai, a legal term) them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words." The positive aspect show the believer what to do; the negative tells him what not to do.

A. It Ruins the Hearers (v. 14b)

"Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers."

1. The seriousness of the command

a) A constant reminderThe Greek word translated "solemnly charge" communicates the idea of a constant reminder and a constant command. Timothy was to constantly remind the leaders of their positive duty and constantly warn them to avoid false teaching. The warning is serious because diamarturomai refers to a solemn command.

b) A healthy fearPaul's solemn command is made even more serious by the next phrase in verse 14, "Solemnly charge them in the presence of God." The leaders were to do their duty out of a healthy fear of God. Paul had given such charges before:(1) 1 Timothy 5:21--"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias."(2) 1 Timothy 6:13-14--"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach."(3) 2 Timothy 4:1--"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the Word."Those are all serious commands. They are not just commands but solemn commands, and not just solemn commands but solemn commands in the presence of God. The intention of the solemn charge is to put fear in the hearts of God's people by reminding them that they are directly accountable to God.

Exploring the Presence of God

1. As a comforting reality

a) Psalm 68:8--"The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God."b) Luke 1:19--The angel told Zacharias, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news."c) Hebrews 9:24--"Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."d) Genesis 27:7--Isaac said, "Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the Lord."

2. As a means of judgment

The presence of God is meant to comfort. But the vast majority of references have to do with judgment.a) Psalm 68:2--"As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish before God."b) Genesis 3:8--Adam and his wife hid themselves after they had sinned so they wouldn't have to face the presence of God.c) Psalm 97:5--"The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth."d) Psalm 114:7--"Tremble, O earth, before the Lord, before the God of Jacob."e) 2 Thessalonians 1:9--"[Unbelievers] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (KJV).While there are times when the presence of the Lord is meant to comfort us, it is more often meant to increase our sense of accountability. We are always in the presence of God, and His presence acts as a controlling factor on how we live. He monitors each of our lives. A solemn charge in the presence of God makes its recipients accountable before the Holy One, the righteous judge.

2. The specifics of the command

Given such a serious command, you would expect Paul to name some vile evil that Timothy was to command people to withdraw from. But Paul says, "Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words."a) The rejection of word battlesThe Greek word translated "wrangle about words" speaks of waging a war of words. Paul called for the leadership to avoid futile debates because they would end up being side-tracked. Evidently the errorists in Ephesus tended to focus on such worthless chatter, which was based on speculation and not on the Word of God (1 Tim. 1:3-4; cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-10). Timothy was not to be drawn into word battles because they are not based on God's special revelation.(1) Satan's strategyThe Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis tell of an older demon, Screwtape, writing to a younger demon, Wormwood, about how to be effective in dealing with people. In his first letter Screwtape said, "Your man has been accustomed, every since

he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily 'true' or 'false,' but as 'academic' or 'practical'.... Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church" ([N.Y.: Macmillan, 1961], p. 8). Demons know that true science and reason will not contribute to their cause--deception. Speculations, not facts, must fill men's minds. All "good" demons will use that strategy because it obscures biblical truth by focusing on temporal concerns.(2) The church's legacySuch jargon has infiltrated many of today's colleges and seminaries. Also, many television evangelists and preachers barrage the church with jargon about their false religious systems. It's had an effect. How else can you explain why some churches have reached the place where they advocate abortion, women preachers, homosexuality, and divorce for any reason? Why has the church allowed unholy leaders to remain in leadership? How is it that husbands no longer lead their homes, and wives have no commitment to the lives of their children? How could the church ever buy into the self-esteem movement at the expense of humility and service to others? Jargon has invaded the church. That's because the church is willing to listen to the world. It is willing to put the Bible alongside the reason of man. In 2 Timothy 2:14 Paul calls the world's jargon useless. Worse than that, it's demonic. First Timothy 4:1-2 speaks of doctrines spawned by demons spoken through hypocritical liars.b) The result of word battlesPaul said these word battles lead to the ruin of the hearers." The Greek word translated "ruin" (katastroph[ma]) means "to overturn," "to subvert," "to upset," or "to overthrow." False teaching doesn't edify; it tears down. It doesn't strengthen; it weakens.Katastroph[ma] is used only one other time in the New Testament, in 2 Peter 2:6, which gives us insight into the kind of ruin Paul was referring to. Peter said God "condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction [katastroph[ma]) by reducing them to ashes." There katastroph[ma] means "total devastation." Paul used it in the same sense in 2 Timothy 2:14--word battles totally destroy the hearers. They lead to the damnation of people's eternal souls. That's why 2 Peter 2:1 calls them destructive heresies that bring about swift destruction. Second Peter 3:16 says, "The untaught and unstable distort [Paul's teaching], as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." We are called to stay away from false teaching because it has the potential of damning the eternal souls of those under its influence.

B. It Shames the Teachers (v. 15)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

1. The key word

The key word is "ashamed." Anyone who teaches anything other than what accurately reflects the word of truth ought to be ashamed. Shame is the painful feeling that arises from an awareness of having done something dishonorable. Anyone who propagates false teaching has reason to be ashamed when he faces God. False teaching is worthy of condemnation by God, not commendation. It doesn't matter to God how many degrees they have or how erudite they might be. They have every reason to stand before God in shame for mishandling God's precious Word.

2. The key responsea) Be diligent

If you're a teacher how do you avoid being ashamed before the Lord? Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent" (Gk., (spoudaz[ma]), "to give diligence," "to give maximum effort," or "to do your best"). Teaching God's Word requires maximum effort. That's why 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." It is hard work.b) Present yourself approved to GodThe Greek word translated "present yourself" in 2 Timothy 2:15 (parist[ma]mi) means "to stand alongside." You should desire to stand alongside God.Paul then says, "Present yourself approved." The Greek word translated "approved" means "proven to be worthy after testing." What is the goal of the teacher? To make a maximum effort so he might someday stand alongside God unashamed because he has proven himself to be worthy. Paul told the Galatians that he was not a manpleaser (1:11). The goal of the apostle Paul

was to please God. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 he says, "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts." The teacher who stands before the Lord and hears, "Well done, good and faithful servant" is one who made a maximum effort.c) Be a hard workerThe Greek word translated "workman" (ergat[ma]es) communicates the idea of energy. It refers to a worker or laborer, not a student. The hard worker is committed to maximum effort so he might come before his master and show him that his work is worthy. As a result he "does not need to be ashamed."d) Handle the word of truth accuratelyIn 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul says, "to handle accurately the word of truth." The literal meaning of the Greek word translated "handling accurately" (orthotome[ma]o) is cutting a straight line.(1) The method(a) Its patternOrthotome[ma]o was used for any task that required a straight line. For example, it was used for cutting a straight line with a saw. It was used for making a straight path through woods or mountains. It was used for building a building, when a straight edge needed to be cut on stone to be sure the building was built level. It was used of cutting a straight line on cloth. It was used of cutting straight lines on hides so they could be pieced together to make a tent.Paul was a leather worker. We often say he was a tentmaker, but a better translation of the Greek word is leather worker. He used animal hides, skins, and perhaps woven hair to make things, possibly tents. You can imagine that anyone making a tent would have to piece together a lot of hides. He would have cut each one just right so he could fit them together. It would be similar to dressmaking. If you don't cut the pieces right from the pattern, the dress won't look or fit right.(b) Its principleIf you don't know how to cut the pieces, you can't make the whole product fit. The same is true in the spiritual realm--biblical theology and exegesis are interdependent. Every teacher must be committed to handling accurately (cutting straight) the Word of truth.(2) The message"Word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) is a phrase used other times in Scripture.(a) Ephesians 1:13"After listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation." The message or word of truth refers to the gospel.(b) James 1:18--"He [God] brought us forth by the word of truth."(c) John 17:17--Jesus said, "Thy word is truth." Here the word of truth refers to all of God's revelation.When you realize the importance of handling the gospel correctly, you've got to acknowledge that there is a lot of preaching today that doesn't. We have to handle the Word accurately so we don't misrepresent the gospel. We have to represent all the Word of God, not in a flippant, off handed way, but in the proper way. That requires diligence and a desire to be approved by God, not men. It demands that you be a workman.

C. It Leads to Ungodliness (v. 16)

"But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness."

1. The degeneration of empty talk

The Greek word translated "avoid" means "to walk around" or "to keep clear of." What are we to avoid? Chatter--jargon of human wisdom apart from God's revelation. Paul called it "worldly [Gk., beb[ma]elos, "common, not set apart"] chatter." It is the common, profane, unholy talk of men.He also called it "empty", which means it has no benefit--it yields no return. But empty words soon become evil words because empty words are like a vacuum. I have a vacuum in my garage I use to clean the car. Once in a while it sucks up something I don't want it to, like a pen or some coins. That's what happens with a vacuum--whatever gets near it rushes in. Empty words become evil words because they suck up sin. Useless talk on useless matters becomes wicked talk. Words that are not of God soon become unholy words.

2. The result of empty talk

False teachers claim to be advancing our thinking, expanding our minds, and leading us to new truth. But what they're saying actually "will lead to further ungodliness" (v. 16). False teachers are ungodly, and they pull down the people who hear them into their own ungodliness. Peter said "many will follow their sensuality" (2 Pet. 2:2). Ungodly conduct is always the fruit of ungodly doctrine.

D. It Spreads Like Gangrene (v. 17a)

"Their talk will spread like gangrene."

Gangrene is dead flesh. The bacterial kind spreads very fast. The Greek word translated "gangrene" (gangraina) can refer to a spreading, consuming disease. To cure gangrene, the patient is sometimes placed in a hyperbaric chamber to expose the affected tissues to oxygen at high pressure, thereby killing the bacteria, which need an oxygen-free environment. The patient is then treated with antibiotics. Gangrene is like a prairie fire. Jude 23 tells us to "save others, snatching them out of the fire." False teaching is a malignancy--it eats up the neighboring tissue and spreads its corrupting doctrine to infect others.

E. It Can lead to Apostasy (vv. 17b-18)

1. The definition of apostasy (vv. 17b, 18a)

"Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth." Hymenaeus and Philetus were apostates, having erred from the truth--like those referred to in Hebrews 6:4-6: "In the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." That's because they in essence "trampled under foot the Son of God, and ... regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which [they were] sanctified, and ... insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29).

2. The error of apostasy (v. 18b)

"Saying that the resurrection has already taken place." These apostates probably believed that the resurrection was nothing more than some mystical experience you had when you went from the unenlightened life to the enlightened life. They probably were buying into a philosophical heresy that was prevalent at the time. A denial of the resurrection is a major error. In 1 Corinthians 15:13-14 Paul says that if there were no resurrection of the dead, then Christ never rose. And if Christ never rose, then neither will we be. A doctrine that denies the resurrection cuts the heart out of the gospel. It's a denial of eternal life in a glorified body like Christ's--the essence of the Christian hope.

3. The effect of apostasy (v. 18c)

"Thus they upset the faith of some." The Greek word translated "upset" literally means "to overturn." The people whose faith was overturned obviously had a non-saving faith. That's because no one can overturn real faith (e.g. John 10:27-29; Rom. 8:30). Second Peter 2:18 says false teachers speak "out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error." Those who are overturned are those who are looking for God, wanting to believe, and are beginning to open up to the gospel. But they come under false teaching and it destroys their weak, non-saving faith. False religious systems wait to suck in the people who are looking for answers to the pains and pressures of life.

F. It Characterizes People Who Don't Belong to the Lord (v. 19)

1. The solid foundation (v. 19a)

Verse 19 says, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands." The firm foundation of God is the church--the redeemed. We are the true people of God who form the solid, immovable foundation that false teachers can't uproot. False teachers will ruin some, shame some, lead some into ungodliness, corrupt some, and overturn the faith of some, but not the elect of God. We are a building not made with hands. We are the temple of the living God. We are the church Christ is building. The gates of hell will not prevail against (Matt. 16:18). We are those who, having had a good work begun in us, will see it completed on the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). We are those who will never be separated from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35). We are those of whom Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:37, 39). False teaching may devastate the souls of many people, and it may confuse believers from time to time, but the foundation of the church of God in Christ is firm. First John 2:14 says, "You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." God called out a people for salvation and eternal glory before the world began.

2. The guaranteed salvation (v. 19b)

Verse 19 says, "Having this seal." A seal was a mark of ownership, just as a builder put his name on the cornerstone to identify it as a building he built. We are the foundation of God, namely His church. He has stamped us as belonging to Him.a) Sovereign election"The Lord knows those who are His."The church can never be touched by false teachers because we are His. He holds us in His sovereign power. We are His for eternity. The first seal we have is we are the elect. That seal is affixed to God's foundation. It guarantees permanence and makes dissolution impossible. In Matthew 7:22-23 the Lord says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord ...; And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" They can't disturb the divine foundation. It will stand because we are the elect and the Lord knows who we are. Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, "God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation."b) Personal sanctification"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."To name the name of the Lord is to be identified with Him. If you belong to the Lord, abstain from wickedness. God's people are not only elect, but also called to righteousness. God's election is an election to holiness. Our salvation is made up of God's predestining mercy and our inevitable duty. Paul said, "You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). If we name the name of the Lord, we'll abstain from wickedness. It is both an exhortation and an affirmation. The one who names the name of the Lord will not apostatize but turn away from sin.The two quotes in 2 Timothy 2:19 appear to be from Numbers 16. Korah rebelled against God, and many people joined him. But God judged them. Verse 5 says, "The Lord will show who is His." That is almost the same wording as the first statement in 2 Timothy 2:19: "The Lord knows those who are His." When Korah and his friends gathered against Moses and the rest of the people, Moses affirmed that the Lord knew who belonged to Him. The second statement in 2 Timothy 2:19 parallels Moses' command to the people in Numbers 16:26: "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them."God will come in judgment, but He knows who He will spare because they belong to Him. We know who they are because they will depart from the tents of wickedness. From the divine side, they're elect; from the human side, they're obedient. All the false teaching Satan wants to bring across our path will avail nothing because we stand firm on the foundation of God. Just as the rebellion under Korah ended in judgment, so will that of every false teacher.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did Paul want Timothy to remind the true teachers of (2 Tim. 2:14)?
2. The leaders in the church at Ephesus were to perform their duty with what in mind (2 Tim. 2:14)?
3. Explain the two aspects of the presence of God.
4. What was the solemn charge that Paul wanted Timothy to communicate to the leaders in Ephesus? Explain?
5. What has invaded the church through the false teachers? What kind of effect is it having on today's church?
6. What does the future hold for those who listen to "word battles" (2 Tim. 2:14)?
7. What is the key word of 2 Timothy 2:15? Why?
8. What four things must believers do to avoid being teachers who will be ashamed before God? Explain each?
9. Explain the literal meaning of the phrase "handling accurately".
10. What is the principle that Paul is teaching by the statement "handling accurately the word of truth"?
11. What is the "word of truth"?
12. According to 2 Timothy 2:16, what are believers to avoid? Why?
13. If people listen to false teachers, what will they be led into (2 Tim. 2:16)?
14. What error were Hymenaeus and Philetus propagating? Why is it a major error (2 Tim. 2:18)?
15. Why did certain people have their faith overturned by listening to the error of the false teachers?

16. What is the firm foundation of God?

17. What are the two aspects of the seal God has put on us? Explain each one.

Pondering the Principles

1. Review the section on the presence of God (see pp. 3-4). Do you live as if God is a controlling factor on your life? Do you think of God as being present with you as you work at your job, drive in your car, go to the store, or relax in the evening. Some people think of God's presence only when they read the Bible or need something. But how would you feel if you spent the entire day with someone, yet he only talked to you once or twice? Read Colossians 3:1-4. Begin to cultivate a mind that is preoccupied with heavenly things. Develop a God-consciousness. Take time to pray right now. Confess to God that you haven't given Him your attention. Begin today to commune with Him constantly throughout the day.

2. Read 2 Timothy 2:19. Spend some time meditating on the truths connected to God's seal on believers. What does it mean to you to know that you belong to God? Answer in the form of a prayer to our almighty God. What do you think Paul means when he said believers should "abstain from wickedness"? How does that apply to you? Is there wickedness present in your life? If so, turn from it right now. Confess it to God, and ask Him to help you to leave it behind.

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